

BRISTOL TOWNSHIP

Soldier says his goal was

By DENISE CLAY
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For many of the soldiers coming home from Iraq, the list of things that they want to do once their service in Operation Iraqi Freedom ends is usually a long one.

But for Joseph Raap, a 19-year-old military policeman from Croydon, the list had only one thing on it.

"The only thing that I wanted to do was to come home," he said. "I wanted to get me and my guys out alive."

After a year in Iraq, Raap came home on Feb. 12. Yesterday, his family made it official with a surprise welcome home/birthday party that included food, good friends and a

visit from someone he had met while in Iraq, Congressman Jim Greenwood, R-8.

As he walked through the Croydon firehouse annex welcoming those who had come to see him, Raap shook hands, exchanged hugs and talked a little bit about what he had seen there. Being a military policeman in a place where things aren't quite settled wasn't an easy task, he said.

"It wasn't a joke," Raap said. "It was the real thing. At first, the [Iraqi] people were happy to see us. We did our job."

Among those who couldn't wait to see him was his grandmother, Louise Fairfield. "I'm very proud of my grandson," she said.

Greenwood came, greeted everyone, and

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to return from Iraq alive

presented Raap with a flag that had flown over Congress in his honor. The congressman was part of a congressional delegation that went to Iraq in January to see firsthand what American soldiers were facing.

Raap was one of the soldiers he met during a luncheon held for soldiers from various states and their congressmen. The two men exchanged e-mail addresses and Greenwood promised to call the family when he returned to the states.

"He introduced himself and asked me where I was from," Raap said. "We talked mostly about going home."

Iraq was a learning experience for him,

Greenwood said.

"When you see what they're up against and you realize that the Sunnis, the Shi'aas and the Kurds really don't like each other, there's no history of democracy in the country and there's terrorism across the borders, it looks like an immovable object. But when you talk to the soldiers, the Iraqi Governing Council and the people who had left the country and came back, you see a can-do sense of optimism. That's the irresistible force that will move this object."

The congressman's visit also led to a picture of Raap and Greenwood that appeared in local newspapers.

It was the first time that Debbie and

William Raap had seen their son in a while.

"When I saw that picture, I cried," his mother said. "I hadn't seen him in a year. He looked good. He was thinner, but he still looked good."

Members of the Croydon Fire Department donated the hall to the family as a way of saying "thank you" to Raap for his service, said Ken Gatton, a fire department trustee.

Greenwood represents the residents of Bucks County, some districts of Abington, Upper Dublin and Upper Moreland in Montgomery County and two wards in Philadelphia.

Denise Clay can be reached at 215-949-4195 or dclay@phillyburbs.com.